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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8615
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1767
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5241
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8841
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6413
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 2036
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4245
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000062

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, DRL, AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM ECON PINR BM

SUBJECT: GAMbari PROVIDES READ-OUT OF RANGOON VISIT

REF: RANGOON 059

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Classified By: CDA Larry Dinger for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

¶1. (C) UNSYG Special Envoy Gambari phoned the Charge to provide a read-out of his Jan. 31-Feb. 3 visit to Burma. He said process issues had gone well, but "tangibles" are more difficult. He is aware the SYG and others need progress on those tangibles. He has sensed "some movement" within the regime on important issues, but concrete progress is "still to be seen." Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK), her National League for Democracy (NLD) Uncles, and a Shan NLD group were full of criticisms. They demanded that the regime free all political prisoners before the SYG visits Burma. Gambari sees that as unrealistic, though he does accept there need to be "high expectations" for any such visit. End summary.

A special briefing for the U.S.

¶2. (C) Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Secretary General's Special Envoy to Burma, phoned the Charge at 2 p.m. on February 3, saying he would not be able to meet a second time with chiefs of mission during his visit. He had just received word from the Government of Burma of a 3 p.m. meeting with Prime Minister Thien Sein, and Gambari's flight would depart Rangoon for Singapore at 4:30. Nonetheless, he wanted to brief the USG.

Process is easy; tangibles more difficult

¶3. (C) Gambari said this visit was better than before in terms of process, "but that is the easy part." Attaining "tangibles" is more difficult. He is aware that the SYG and the international community await such tangibles, but those "remain to be seen."

Opposition leaders being tough negotiators

¶4. (C) Gambari reported that his meeting with ASSK and the

NLD Central Executive Committee went well. The opposition figures were "hard on criticisms." ASSK stated flatly that the SYG can't come to Burma unless all political prisoners are freed. Gambari doesn't see that as a reasonable demand. He understands that, clearly, one must take into account "high expectations" for a SYG visit, but freeing all political prisoners may be too much to ask. Gambari said his meeting with leaders of the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy was a "breakthrough." He had unsuccessfully asked to meet them on each previous visit. He judged that the Shan NLD is very close to NLD positions on the issues: "quite tough."

Burma regime still formulating positions

¶5. (C) Asked what the Burma Government has offered, Gambari indicated he has heard little yet. He proposed to "give them time to give positions." He said he "can see some movement" regarding political prisoners, dialogue, and the economic forum concept; but here too concrete progress "is still to be seen."

Seeks close relationship via USUN

¶6. (C) Gambari noted, as he had when meeting with chiefs of mission (reftel), that he believes he has a relationship with U.S. PermRep to the UN Rice. He asked the Charge to share with USUN any developments on the ground in Burma for forwarding to him. Asked if that meant the regime still is not prepared to allow a UN political office in Burma, Gambari said, "They don't want my presence. They are nervous, but they have indicated willingness to consider periodic, intermittent visits by UN political staff."

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Comment

¶7. (C) The inability of Gambari to schedule an out-brief with chiefs of mission indicates just how little control he has had over his schedule. Still, it was good he could phone. That he served as catalyst for a meeting of ASSK and the NLD Uncles was certainly useful. However, Gambari's read-out suggests very little, if any, movement took place on the major substantive issues...unless some unexpected breakthrough occurred in his last meeting with the PM. The demand by ASSK, the NLD, and the Shan NLD for the release of all political prisoners is understandable, since those activists need to be in the midst of any genuine dialogue on Burma's political future. But that demand is unpalatable for the regime, which appears intent on "managing" an election in 2010 in part by keeping most charismatic opposition leaders sealed away. We do not believe a SYG visit to Rangoon should come cheaply for the regime. Preparation should ensure significant progress on core issues: political prisoners and genuine dialogue. Just how much progress is enough will surely be the subject of conversation in New York and Washington in the coming weeks. Certainly more is needed than seems to have been achieved in the past four days.

DINGER